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ABSTRACT

A pilot study investigated the varieties of English used in two commercial contexts and the success of speakers from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds in transmitting intended information to listeners from other native language backgrounds. A questionnaire was administered to both native speakers of English (NS) and non-native speakers (NNS) of English to determine: (1) their ability to differentiate NS- and NNS-originated texts and to identify the author's intent, and (2) their familiarity with advertising contexts and/or non-native varieties and how that familiarity affected understanding of the content. Both NS and NNS were equally able to identify NS-originated texts, but NS were more sensitive to NNS-originated texts. NS readers were better able to identify promotional correspondence, while NNS reasers evaluated sales offers less positively than business communications, regardless of the text's origin. Results suggest that readers' ability to distinguish NS- and NNS-originated texts may influence receptivity to cross-cultural promotional campaigns communicated in English. It is concluded that it may not be differences, but attitudes toward those differences, that help determine the acceptance and effect of varieties of English used in cross-cultural contexts. (MSE)

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ON THE ENGLISHES USED IN WRITTEN BUSINESS COMMUNICATIONS ACROSS CULTURES: CAN READERS TELL THE DIFFERENCE? AND DOES IT MATTER?

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On the Englishes used in written business communications across cultures: Implications for transnational marketing direct by mail*

Current estimates vary regarding the global spread and use of English, but observers agree that non-native speakers of English (NNS) currently outnumber native speakers (NS). While for a majority of NNS and NS the need to communicate on a global scale does not now exist, as international marketers are becoming aware, recent developments have converged to put technological mechanisms in place for an explosive increase in transnational direct marketing.[1]

Fueled by the rapid growth in recent years of credit cards within international networks (such as VISA, American Express), other international payment mechanisms (such as international business reply mail) and international toll free telephone numbers, the international marketplace is booming. Articles on transnational direct marketing are appearing in trade magazines such as Direct Marketing, with writers like Ralston (1988, 114) predicting that "English-speaking credit cardholders worldwide will become a single direct response consumer market" and that "use of English will be dominant". As an increasing number of international firms expand their markets to become transnational direct marketers, and NNS and NS marketers adopt methods previously proven successful among American NS marketers, problems related to the varieties of English used by in marketing communications will become increasingly important.

Several researchers of cross-cultural communication in English, using differing theoretical frameworks and methodologies, have found that the "intelligibility" or "comprehensibility" of the English used (following Smith and Nelson, 1985[2]) alone is not sufficient for understanding; for maximal communicative success, audiences must also be able to draw appropriate inferences from the text (e.g., Smith 1987a, Bouton, 1988 forthcoming; Haneda and Shima 1981). Since the success of transnational direct mail marketing depends on worldwide *similarities* in markets for products or services, regardless of their

point of origin (Ralston1988, 32), responsibility for making texts "interpretable" across cultures inevitably falls to copywriters who must take into account-and exploit-sociolinguistic factors which influence consumers' receptivity to an offer.

This paper reports on a pilot experimental study which was designed to help identify some linguistic issues that may be relevant to the success of written sales and ordinary business communications. The study extends the author's previous investigation of cross-cultural differences in the pragmatic understandings used to interpret direct mail advertising communications (1988, forthcoming). Using an experimental approach and methodology, the study explores -on a small scale-some factors which may influence the "appropriateness" of English used in two commercial contexts. It also attempts to address the question suggested by Tarone and Yule (1987) for future research: "how successful are (speakers from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds who use communication strategies differentially) in transmitting intended information to listeners from other native language backgrounds?" (p. 64)

A questionnaire was administered to both NS and NNS in order to determine, first, whether there are differences in ability to identify NS and NNS originated texts, and the authors' intent (interpretability of the text), and second, how NS and NNS readers' familiarity with advertising contexts and/or non-native varieties may affect their understanding of the contents, hence communicative outcomes. Based on the author's experience and previous findings, it was expected that:

(1) NS subjects' would be better able than NNS to distinguish between texts written by NS or NNS writers.
(2) NS subjects would be better able than NNS to identify marketing promotion letters as compared to informational business letters
(3) Both NS and NNS would rate NS identified texts more positively and would judge texts perceived to be written by NNS as less acceptable.
(4) Both NS and NNS would rate texts interpreted to be sales offers as less acceptable, regardless of origination.

Background Theory and Research

Of the many linguistic studies which bear on NS-NNS communications, the most relevant are those which focus on differences in language users' expectations with regard to "good" written discourse (e.g., Clyne 1987), or breakdowns in NS-NNS verbal interactions (e.g., Gumperz 1978). Both of these studies illustrate Smith's (1987b, 5) point that miscommunication across cultures in English result from accepting the erroneous hypothesis that ..."when English is the common language, one can expect the words, sentences, and discourse to have common meaning across cultures". However, equally relevant are those studies (e.g., Kachru 1986) which deal with the sociolinguistic variables related to varietal differences in English. These show how nativized varieties which are distinguished by their stylistic, syntactic and pragmatic features are clearly not a communicative burden for their users.

There is general agreement that the appropriateness of communications in social contexts (following Gumperz and Hymes' notion of communicative competency, 1972) is dependent on a variety of factors, not least of which are "errors" which may render a phrase or sentence incomprehensible, as Dulay and Burt note (1982). However, as they also note, the number of studies which study the communicative effect of these errors are relatively few (p. 189). Moreover, a search of the literature on the factors which influence NS-NNS communications failure reveals few studies of communicative effect, regardless of the researcher's theoretical perspective. More often, one encounters research which investigates NS vs NNS proficiency with regard to one or another component of communicative competence: grammatical, sociolinguistic or strategic.[3]

One such recent study is Bouton's (1988 forthcoming), which explores NS vs NNS differences in interpreting a written text. Overall, he concludes that cultural background plays an important role in predicting relative success in drawing appropriate inferences from utterances. Another study is that of Tarone and Yule (1987) who investigate NNS and NS differing communicative strategies and levels of proficiency in mastering sociolinguistic skills.

In addition to the above research, given the complexity of the subject, it is also necessary to extend the scope of inquiry to include cross-cultural differences in language attitudes, the practical implications of variational differences in use of English, and those which deal specifically with "advertising language" and the features which appear to typify this genre of communication. In many cases, this requires a crossing of disciplinary boundaries.

Particularly valuable are the insights provided by social psychologists regarding language attitudes (Ryan and Giles, 1982), "speech communication" studies which investigate cross-cultural differences in written business communications (Haneda and Shima, 1981) and marketing texts which address international direct marketing strategies (Dillon, 1976). Also pertinent, although comparatively few in number, are linguistic analyses of advertising media. The majority of studies within the last two decades are pragmatics or speech act theory-based (eg. Geis, 1982; Vestergaard and Schroeder, 1986) or approach the subject from the perspective of discourse analysis (e.g., Goffman 1981 on "Radio talk"; Lakoff 1981 on television commercials). Among these, but rare, are studies which have addressed cross-cultural differences in the communicative styles and strategies of NNS speakers in marketing contexts specifically (Masavisut et al, 1986; Tsuda 1984).

Description of The Study

Subjects:

To test the hypotheses concerning perceived differences between NS and NNS originated text, I used native and non-native educated English speakers as subjects. I wanted the groups to be approximately equal in size, in educational level/experience, and in range of their familiarity with differing varieties of business correspondence. Thus, all subjects were drawn from a pool of students attending Georgetown University known to the interviewer to be pursuing degrees in Linguistics.

Group 1: Non-native English speakers (NNS)

This group was made up of 15 NNS speakers from the following countries: Greece, Denmark, Brazil, The Philipines, Japan, Indonesia, Finland, Jordan, China, Yugoslavia. The subjects ranged in terms of their

residence in the U.S., from as little as two months at the time the survey was taken, to as many as ten years; the average term of residency for the group was 3.6 years. All subjects had completed a Bachelors Degree, and 50% of the students had completed a Masters Degree and were PhD candidates. Subjects in this group were familiar with linguistic analyses, and in varying degrees, with American and British varieties of English. As a group, they were also somewhat less familiar with direct response solicitations and direct mail media, compared to Group 2 (this information gleaned from Part 2 of the survey).

Group 2: Native English speakers (NS)

This group was made up of 15 NS of American English, 90% of whom had completed a Bachelors degree or higher. All reported English as their "native tongue", although their ethnicity varied. All were assumed to be users of "American English"[4], as well as familiar with mailed direct response advertising offers.

Data:

Four kinds of representative text segments were chosen, each sample comprising the introductory paragraph or first 50 words of a business letter. These examples were drawn from business correspondence of two types: advertising sales letters and everyday correspondence, to total 20 samples:

Group 1.) NNS written direct mail advertising offers, originating in:
(2) Hong Kong (1) India

Group 2.) NNS written business correspondence, originating in:
(2) Japan (1) Hong Kong (1) France (1) U.S.

Group 3) NS written direct mail advertising offers, originating in
(2) England (4) U.S. (2) Canada

Group 4) NS written business correspondence, originating in:
(1) Canada (3) England

The less than equal proportion of NNS originated texts and business correspondence as a category overall (40% in both) reflects their less than equal representation in real life, as well as the difficulties in obtaining representative samples.

The numbers of direct mail advertising offers across cultures in English are relatively few, compared to the volume of direct mail offers originating in native English speaking countries which are destined for "home" consumption. Further, the volume of ordinary business correspondence in English is greater than that intended to sell products and services.

Test Instrument:

To accomplish the aims of the pilot study, I designed a two-part questionnaire (see Appendix A). The first part contained 20 Sample Texts (per above data description), each followed by a series of closed and open-ended questions. The second part (last page of the survey) required subjects' to provide biographical information and self-report their degree of exposure and level of response to (primarily mailed) direct sales and marketing solicitations. Since this was a pilot study, a range of questions and question formats were used--both closed and open-ended, direct and indirect--to gain some insight into the most profitable and/or viable ways of directing future research.

Part 1: Questions designed to elicit subjects' responses in four general categories:

a) identification of writer's primary intent (interpretability):

This close-ended question was designed to force readers to choose among three responses. The choices were predicated on the assumption that, most simplistically, the meanings behind the words could be inferred from the text as either "the author intended to inform" (to provide information) or "intended to prompt the reader to take action" ("to persuade..."). The latter is the primary intent of direct response marketing communications, regardless of the vehicle (broadcast or print). However, the phrase "to persuade to take action" was chosen because it was judged less likely to skew the subject's response. (compare "to persuade you to buy or order", or "to sell you products or services. The third alternative "*I have no idea* " was offered as a choice to readers who were unable to discern the writers' intention.

b) rating of the writer's use of language (language attitudes):

The subjects evaluated the contents of each passage by three criteria deemed relevant to a description of the text, and ranked each

factor on a 5-point differential scale ranging from "yes" to "no". The factors were: message clarity (comprehensibility); language proficiency of the writer (competence); perceived distance of the writer's language from that held as "correct" by the reader (acceptability).

c) level of commitment:

The subjects were asked to subjectively assess their willingness to read the entire letter, based on this short segment, in order to indirectly gain information pertinent to the acceptability of the contents.

d) writer's identification as English L1 or L2 user:

Readers were asked to judge whether the author was a non-native speaker of English, or a native speaker, in two possible categories: American or non-American.

Part 2: Subjects were first asked to enter basic biographical information, including birthplace, number of years residing in the U.S., native language, and language currently spoken more than 50% of the time. The second half of the sheet asked subjects to self-report and rate their level of exposure and prior responses to direct response marketing offers received in the mail and by telephone.

Procedure:

Subjects were requested to complete the questionnaire at their own pace, and without direct supervision. A brief period of time was spent with each subject to ensure that the instructions were understood (the instructions for filling out the survey were also printed on the cover sheet of each packet). Subjects were assured of anonymity, and encouraged to note any additional comments or provide whatever additional information they thought necessary to make their evaluations clear. In a few instances these comments were augmented by conversations which occurred at the time respondents turned in their questionnaires, and these comments were noted immediately following the conversation. All surveys were completed within a three-week period (Oct/Nov 1987) and delivered directly to the author, who tabulated the results and takes responsibility for all errors.

Given the sample size, and the purposes of the study, statistical analyses was considered inappropriate. It was decided that measures of frequency and percentages would suffice to describe the responses.

Findings and Discussion

HYPOTHESIS 1.

When asked whether the sample of writing was produced by a NNS or NS speaker of English, two-thirds of the time, on average, both groups of subjects were able to make a correct match. NS averaged 15 correct matches out of 20, and NNS averaged 12.8 correct matches out of 20. However, the first hypothesis proposed, that NS would be better able to distinguish between NS and NNS originated texts, was only partially supported.

While it was found that both NS and NNS were approximately equal in their ability to identify NS written texts, the groups varied in their ability to identify NNS written texts. The totals were balanced to reflect the proportionate numbers of texts in different categories. The percentages for correct matches by status of reader compared to originator of texts are:

%NS Subjects correctly matching	NS texts=62.9	NNS texts=45.6
%NNS Subjects correctly matching	NS texts=60.0	NNS texts=30.0

My interpretation of these results are that NS and NNS are about equally able to identify texts as written by NS, but that NS on average are more sensitive to NNS varieties. As a possible extension of this, one might conjecture that NNS audiences (assuming they are less able to discriminate between "standard and non-standard" varieties) might be less influenced by the NS/NNS factor when evaluating written texts. On the other hand, this outcome also suggests that NS as well as NNS are aware of varietal differences, and are more able to discern those texts which meet their expectations regarding L1 proficiency in writing.

This explanation is reinforced by the actual number of correct matches, i.e., NS and NNS relative ability to correctly identify authors as specifically American or non-American NS. NS had 30% more correct matches than NNS.

Additionally, the results suggest that subjects in both groups are most proficient when identifying certain texts. There were six samples that 3/4 of the subjects (that is, 25 or more of the 30 subjects queried) were able to match correctly. All were written by NS, five of the six were sales letters, and only one of the six was British... the other five were written by Americans or Canadians. This outcome suggests that both NS and NNS may be especially sensitive to texts which not only conform to native speaker norms, but meet their expectations with regard to written marketing (sales) communications.

This interpretation is supported by my findings with regard to the second hypothesis.

HYPOTHESIS 2.

The second hypothesis predicted that NS would be better able than NNS in identifying promotional (sales) correspondence, and this hypothesis was supported by the results. Question #1 asked subjects to determine the primary purpose of the letter, based on its first paragraph or equivalent. Readers could choose "to provide information"; "to persuade to take action"; "I have no idea". When subjects' responses to this question were tabulated, and matched against the known categories for each text sample (NS or NNS written, Business or marketing), it was found that NS made 18% more correct matches than NNS overall, and that they made 36% more correct matches than NNS when the author's intent was sales, and 14% more when the author's intent was to inform.

One possible explanation for these differences is that NS are simply more familiar with written direct response offers in general, so that they are better able to identify them when they see them out of context. In anticipation that some additional support for this speculation would be needed, subjects were asked to evaluate their experience in a variety of situations, primarily those involving their responses to direct mail solicitations (bottom portion, Part 2 of the questionnaire attached). Respondents ranked their degree of exposure, and expected reaction, to seven situations involving this kind of media on a five point scale ranging from "never" (1) to "always" (5). The statements ranged from those involving receipt of sales letters and

catalogs, to opening and reading all mail, to reported level of purchases by mail, to responses to mail and phone surveys. For example: "I respond to marketing surveys___by mail___by telephone" (1=never, 2=occasionally 3=frequently, 4=most of the time, 5=always). Subjects' responses were tallied and divided by seven to get average marketing strategy "familiarity" scores per person.

As might be expected, NS scores (average 2.57) were higher than NNS scores (average 2.39), although the small number of subjects preclude strong claims regarding the significance of this difference. Moreover, when responses to the statement "I purchase products or or services through the mail" were compared, 22 out of 30 subjects reported "occasionally"; with the remaining subjects fairly evenly divided at the extremes ("never" or "most of the time" or "always")

Also, though this could not be pursued, the responses suggested an inverse relation between level of exposure to direct mail offers and subjects' decisions to open and read all mail regardless of origin or packaging. (Statements a,b compared to c,d). That is, with increased exposure to items which "in context" are identifiable as sales there may come decreased receptivity to marketing offers, regardless of the NS or NNS status of readers at the outset or their ability to match words to intent once they've read the material.

Another possible explanation for NS' subjects ability to correctly identify intent, and persuasive discourse in particular, in these sample texts is that NS may expect a linear as opposed to digressive organizational structure. That is, they are comfortable with looking for-and finding-the presentation of the "main point" early on in the discourse. Kaplan (172, 1976) proposed that discourse types are related to genetic language types and Western notions regarding the norms for logical thinking. Clyne (1987) on the other hand presents evidence that differences may have more to do with "world view", i.e., are culturally conditioned. Regardless, the idea that readers' backgrounds influence their expectations is critical, since both NS and NNS writers depend on readers' ability to accurately infer intentions.

If readers will look for intentions in places other than where writers expect them to for clues, the effectiveness of the communication will surely be jeopardized. One way to test this

possibility, in an indirect way, is to determine the number of subjects (by status, NS or NNS) who chose "I have no idea" when asked to guess the primary purpose of the text, then relate these choices to known information about the text (business or marketing letters, written by NS or NNS).

First, NNS chose "I have no idea" 30% more often than NS whether the letter was written by a NS or a NNS. Hover, while approximately 16.5% of the answers overall were "I have no idea", their distribution was not evenly divided between NS and NNS. Texts written by NS or NNS, when read by NS, were relatively more easily categorized as either "informational" or "sales" letters out of context (ie., on the basis of first paragraph wording alone) compared to texts written by NS or NNS and read by NNS. That is, NNS were apt to choose this response more frequently than NS, regardless of the source of the text.

Moreover, as one might expect, NS readers have the easiest time inferring authors' intentions (the meaning behind the text, or its "interpretability", when the writer is also a NS. Only about 3% of NS readers who chose "I don't know" did so when the author was also NS, compared to almost twice that percent of NNS readers who chose that response for NS originated text.

Further, there seems to be relatively greater difficulty in determining intent, when the text is written by a NNS, regardless of the language status of the reader, though this difficulty seems to be most highly associated with NNS interpreting NNS written texts. Both NS and NNS chose "I have no idea" less often when the text was written by a NS (about 8.% vs. 14%), and about 30% more of the time this choice was made by NNS for texts written by NNS.

Although my interpretation of these results can only be tentative, I would suggest they point to two important, and potential equally valid explanations. The first, and one which supports my earlier claim that accuracy in matching is tied to readers ability to isolate writers' intentions, is that however English is spoken world-wide, the way it is perceived to be best communicated in business writing is to conform to Western ideals with regard to structure (main point first). The second explanation, also supported by these results, is that NNS may be more

reluctant to categorize writers' intentions when determinations cannot be made with certainty.

If the response "I have no idea" by reader or writer status (NS/NNS) is related to type of text (ordinary business correspondence or sales letter), interesting and contradictory patterns emerge from the data. The number of times a NS subject would choose "I have no idea" when the text actually represents an attempt to provide information, is less likely when the text is written by a NS. This is even more apparent when the text is intended to prompt action. Only two of 15 NS subjects chose "I have no idea" when the aim was sales, and it was written by a NNS. Yet NNS were three times as likely to choose this response when the object was provision of information.

As additional support for this argument, the number of times readers chose this answer for business letters was about equally divided in between NS/NNS texts. In other words, business correspondence is not necessarily related to- nor is it seen as a particularly NS or NNS activity. Yet when the totals are compared for business vs marketing letters, taking into account whether they are NS or NNS written, the differences are extreme: four times more frequently than sales letters, business letters were not able to be identified as such by readers (56 instances of this choice vs 15).

HYPOTHESIS 3 and 4.

The third and fourth hypothesis concerned NS/NNS differences in evaluating NS originated texts: I expected that both groups would rate texts identified as NS-written, or promotional in purpose, more positively than texts written by NNS and informational in purpose. To determine this, I calculated the results of question (b), by status of reader compared to the source and purpose of the text. Responses on the five-point scale were given equivalent 1-5 points (1=yes, 2=mostly, 3=acceptable, 4=marginally, 5=no) then were tabulated for each of the three statements. I also tallied the answers to question (c), which asked readers to report their inclination to read the rest of the letter, based on the (given) first paragraph.

In almost every case it turned out that NNS readers rated texts as less acceptable. That is, they rated the texts less clear (2.19 vs 1.81),

the authors less educated (2.12 vs 1.93) but perceived the English as sounding "more right" to them (2.21 vs 2.45), regardless of the source of the text or its purpose. Why NNS should be more demanding and/or harsher critics of texts is unknown. However, when the responses are broken down by writer and reader status, the findings provide further information. And, to the point, they only partially support the hypotheses.

As the charts below show, the groups differ in their evaluations of the letters written by NS, although highest rating is given by NS to sales letters written by NS.

Does the writer make sense? Is the message clear?

Bus. texts by NS	Bus. texts by NNS-Mktg texts by NS	Mktg texts by NNS
rated by NS=2.2	rated by NS=1.98	rated by NS=1.19 rated by NS=2.4
rated by NNS=2.5	rated by NNS=2.2	rated by NNS=1.89 rated by NNS=2.5

Does the writer "know" English? Educated?

Bus. texts by NS	Bus. texts by NNS-Mktg texts by NS	Mktg texts by NNS
rated by NS=1.86	rated by NS=2.4	rated by NS=1.5 rated by NS=1.8
rated by NNS=2.3	rated by NNS=2.2	rated by NNS=2.5 rated by NNS=2.5

Does the wording sound "right" to me

Bus. texts by NS	Bus. texts by NNS-Mktg texts by NS	Mktg texts by NNS
rated by NS=2.5	rated by NS=2.5	rated by NS=1.7 rated by NS=1.8
rated by NNS=3.1	rated by NNS=2.4	rated by NNS=3.2 rated by NNS=2.6

It seems that the largest differences are found between NS and NNS readers' estimates of message clarity and the "rightness" of the wording compared to the purpose of the letter. The smallest differential was found between NS and NNS estimates regarding the author's education and knowledge of English. Extrapolating from these results, one might conjecture that texts can "read" as if they were written by relatively less educated persons, not make a lot of sense, and still sound acceptably "right" more of the time to NNS than to NS. This paradoxical situation is explainable if language attitudes play a greater role in determining the acceptability of texts for NNS readers.

Unlike NS readers, the NNS readers evaluated sales offers less positively than business communications, regardless of the text's origin. However, when NNS readers' ratings of texts by type (to provide information or to persuade to action) were tallied, some interesting differences across criteria were found. For example, while there was little difference in the way NS subjects viewed the "rightness" of texts written by NS or NNS (1.7 vs. 1.8), for this criterion NNS gave a higher rating to the promotional texts written by NNS vs NS. Conversely, the greatest difference was found between the ratings given by NS to NNS and NS sales texts with regard to the texts' clarity and "education" of the writer. Yet for NNS readers, the writer's status had little relation to their evaluation of the texts' acceptability.

Question (c) required readers to estimate their interest in reading the rest of the letter, based on their perceptions of the first paragraph. Subjects' responses to this question were sorted by NS and NNS, by type of letter, and source-NS or NNS composed texts. The findings suggest that both NS and NNS subjects are less likely to be interested in reading letters to their conclusion when they determine them to be sales letters, and that communications-regardless of type-are more critically evaluated by NNS. One third more of those saying "Yes" to the statement "Based on this 1st paragraph, I would be inclined to read the rest of this letter" did so when they had also perceived the letter to be ordinary business correspondence. Further, it is even more apparent from subjects' responses that NNS originated sales letters would be the least acceptable form and source of communication. Only about 8% of those 40% who would continue to read a sales letter would do so when the text was perceived to have been written by a NNS. This result is in contrast to the approximately 30% percent of readers who said they would read the letter if it was a business letter written by a NNS or a sales letter written by a NS.

This result is surprising, given the comments made by several respondents with regard to their choosing the author of the text. Whether or not they accurately identified the author, or the author's intent, they were generally harsh in their comments when they said "native speaker, American" and stated their reasons for their choice. Phrases like "sounds like millions of other letters....similar to "junk

mail" I get all the time...sounds like TV...overstatement, exaggerated claims, overly aggressive" were common. On the other hand, letters judged to be written by NNS were described as "just too formal or flowery...awkward, halting grammar...stilted expression... too complicated in expression". Yet, despite readers' disdain for texts judged to be NS' American, and relatively greater tolerance for those judged to be NNS, when asked if they would read the rest of the letter a greater number of NS and NNS subjects preferred to continue reading sales letters if they were written by NS.

Conclusions and Directions for Further Research

While currently varieties of English pose few communicative problems for speakers within non-native English speaking countries, as English spreads around the globe, the volume of cross-cultural marketing will be limited only by the mass media and distribution capabilities of non-native English speaking countries. And, and as telecom and surface communications improve, marketing across cultures will rise proportionately. This pilot study suggests that readers' ability to differentiate NS and NNS originated texts and their differences in perceptions of English may influence their receptivity to cross-cultural *but English -based* promotional campaigns...with wider educational and economic implications.

While it is clear that such a narrow study cannot provide definitive conclusions, the results point to real areas of concern for educators and businesspeople (among others) whose primary goal is communicative success, whether it is the provision of information or sales of product. While the interpretability of differing Englishes clearly cannot be assessed in this kind of limited study, it seems fairly reasonable to assume on the basis of the data collected that even such "context free" determinations as those made by the subjects participating in this study are being influenced by factors that go beyond perceptions of language intelligibility or comprehensibility.

In sum, it may not be differences, but attitudes toward those differences that may play a large role in determining the acceptance and effect of English varieties is cross-cultural contexts. The issue is

not whether distinctions can be made between intelligibility, comprehensibility and interpretability as Sajavaara (1987) suggests, but rather to what degree perceptions of differences exist and what relative importance is attributed to these levels of meaning by speakers whose livelihood depends on communicative success.

*An earlier version of this paper was presented at the 7th Annual Conference on Languages and Communication for World Business and the Professions, Ann Arbor MI April 7-9, 1988

Notes

1. See, for example, Direct Marketing magazine, April 1988, with articles such as Ralston's on "Transnational Direct Marketing"; or Sanghavi's on "International 800: An update on New Strategic Initiatives"

2. The terms "intelligibility", "comprehensibility" and "interpretability" are disambiguated by the authors (p. 334) in order to help clarify the differing levels of meaning which constrain cross-cultural communication. They define intelligibility as word/utterance recognition, comprehensibility as word/utterance meaning (locutionary force), and interpretability as the meaning behind words/utterances (illocutionary force). Of these criteria, the last two are relevant to this study.

3. following Canale and Swain's tripartite model (1980). They propose three components of communicative competence: grammatical competence (the knowledge of what is grammatically correct in a language; sociolinguistic competence (the knowledge of what is socially aceptable in a language; strategic competence (the knowledge of how to use communcation strategies to communicate intended meaning.

4. I use the terms American English and British English here for convenience only. However, these labels, like other handy linguistic "portmanteaux" such as Indian English", "African English", which are used to designate nativized varieties of English, are not meant to imply uniformity in the variety or in linguistic competence.

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